

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28) and Rep. Diana DeGette (CO-1) were today joined by Reps. Nita Lowey (NY-18), Rosa DeLauro (CT-3), Lois Capps (CA-23), Henry Waxman (CA-30), Jerrold Nadler (NY-8), and Michael Michaud (ME-2) in sending a letter to the Secretary of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt urging reconsideration of the appointment of Dr. Susan Orr as the new Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs.

Congressional Leaders Condemn Appointment of Dr.

Susan Orr

A Vocal Critic of Contraception - Now in Charge of Contraception Programs

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"We are deeply disappointed that the Bush Administration, for the second time, has chosen a politically polarizing and unqualified candidate for this appointment. Much like Dr. Eric Keroack, Dr. Orr's professional background demonstrates an intention by this Administration to undercut the value and importance of family planning services to low-income and uninsured men and women," read the letter. **"In order to ensure that the mission of Title X remains intact, we strongly urge you to reconsider the appointment of Dr. Orr as the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs. Americans deserve better.**

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs (DASPA) oversees Title X, the nation's family planning program, which provides family planning and preventative health care services to over five million low-income individuals. Title X services help many of those across the nation avoid approximately one million unintended pregnancies a year.

Dr. Susan Orr was appointed to her post on Monday, October 15th and will oversee the \$283 million in annual grants to provide low-income families and others with contraceptive services, preventive screenings and counseling. The position does not require Senate confirmation, and HHS still has the ability to choose another individual to hold the office permanently, as Dr. Orr's

position is in an acting capacity.

Many believe that Dr. Orr's positions are out of sync with the American public. While at the Family Research Council, Dr. Orr publicly opposed the inclusion of contraceptive coverage in private health insurance plans while supporting the President Bush's attempt to exclude such coverage from the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program. However, according to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2004, 98% of sexually active women have used some method of contraception at one point in their life.

The full text of the letter is below:

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt

Secretary of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20201-0004

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

The recent appointment of Dr. Susan Orr as the new Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs (DASPA) once again raises serious concerns about the federal government's commitment to family planning. We believe the appointment of Dr. Orr is yet another misguided decision by an administration that is intent on undermining women's health in the United States. The use of contraceptives is a proven success for reducing unintended pregnancy and the need for abortion. Yet this marks the second time that the Administration has appointed an individual who clearly lacks a commitment to the mission of Title X and frankly seems unabashedly opposed to birth control overall.

As you know, the DASPA oversees Title X, the nation's family planning program, which provides preventative health care services to over five million low-income individuals annually, including high-quality, comprehensive family planning. These services are crucial in preventing approximately one million unintended pregnancies each year.

Through her work at the Family Research Council, Dr. Orr publicly opposed the inclusion of contraceptive coverage in private health insurance plans and supported the President's attempt to exclude such coverage from the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program. She then said of contraception, "Fertility is not a disease. It's not a medical necessity that you have it."

Her positions stand in opposition to the goal of the Title X program and could jeopardize the health of millions of American men and women. One of the official stated goals of the Title X program is to "provide access to contraceptive supplies and information to all who want and need them with priority given to low-income persons." Given Dr. Orr's public statements, we believe she is wholly unqualified to administer the nation's family planning program.

For more than 35 years, the Title X program has been a hallmark of quality preventative health care, enabling public health practitioners to provide high-quality family planning services and other preventative health care to low-income or uninsured individuals who may otherwise lack access to health care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention included family planning in its list of the "Ten Great Public Health Achievements in the 20th Century."

We are deeply disappointed that the Bush Administration, for the second time, has chosen a politically polarizing and unqualified candidate for this appointment. Much like Dr. Eric Keroack, Dr. Orr's professional background demonstrates an intention by this Administration to undercut the value and importance of family planning services to low-income and uninsured men and women.

In order to ensure that the mission of Title X remains intact, we strongly urge you to reconsider the appointment of Dr. Orr as the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs. Americans deserve better.

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